

An aerial photograph of a coastal town and wetlands. A river flows through the center, bordered by a road and buildings on the left, and a large, flat, brownish wetland area on the right. The background shows a large body of water and distant mountains under a cloudy sky.

# REIMAGINING *the* Willapa

Reimagining the Willapa:  
Growing Together for the Next 50 Years  
*"Sustainably Working Lands – Our Heritage and Our Future"*

A 2022 Report by the  
Center for Sustainable Infrastructure



# REIMAGINING *the* **Willapa**

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# Introduction



## Sustainably Working Lands: Our Heritage and Our Future

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**WILLAPA BAY** is a special place, blessed with beautiful scenery and rich in natural resources. Those resources – particularly timber, fish, and shellfish – sustained native peoples for time immemorial, and the region’s settlers for the last 220 years. In recent years pressure on those resources has grown, and our understanding of what is sustainable has evolved. Since the downturn of the timber industry decades ago, communities along Willapa Bay have suffered.

Today, leaders from around the Willapa are coming together to reimagine a new future for the area, in which natural resources power economic and community vitality, but sustainably and without decline. These leaders are bringing fresh eyes and broader vision to the challenge – including not just economic renewal, but renewal built for the long term. Resilience, sustainability, innovation, clean energy, and opportunities for young people to stay and thrive are some of the new priorities leaders are bringing as they map a vibrant future that makes the most of natural resources for the long haul.

The Willapa is pioneering a future where natural resource industries such as forest products, oysters, and fishing continue to provide for the people, but in innovative, sustainable ways that reflect new possibilities and knowledge. With a regional network of recreation opportunities, tourism is a key part of the future here too – but tourism that honors and celebrates sustainable natural resource-based industries, jobs, and families, rather than competes against them. And by investing in smart infrastructure that will be resilient to 21st century changes, local communities and their economies will be supported for decades to come.

Willapa Bay leaders are advancing a vision of sustainable economic and community renewal, and multiple projects to realize that vision, built on these key strategies:

- **Natural Resource Innovation Economy:** bring innovation to natural resource challenges and opportunities to grow sustainable jobs for the long haul. Projects: Sustainable Shellfish Innovation, Energy Innovation District.
- **Resilient Infrastructure:** design regional infrastructure for 21st century realities and a changing landscape, to support sustainably thriving communities. Projects: Shoalwater Bay & Tokeland Infrastructure Resilience, Business-Ready Downtowns, Meeting Critical Housing Needs.
- **Regional Recreation Network:** take a regional view and weave together a network of recreational opportunities that draws visitors and connects them to the region’s working lands heritage and future. Projects: Trail-Ready Willapa, Willapa Hospitality Institute and Culinary Destination.

# Process Overview

In late 2021 the Port of Willapa Harbor hired the Center for Sustainable Infrastructure to facilitate a community-wide process to develop a new economic development vision, and a strategy with prioritized projects, for North Pacific County's future.

In December 2021, an informal group of community leaders and advocates began meeting as a Steering Group (SG) to guide the process. They met every other week through the winter and early spring, conducted a two-day tour of projects, and made impressive progress in just a few months. The group, which eventually included 33 people representing 24 organizations, stepped up to the opportunity to reimagine a positive future for this struggling area.

This report captures the community's values and principles, its vision, strategy and projects for renewal, CSI recommendations for moving the strategy forward, participants in the process, and a slide presentation of the "Reimagining the Willapa" vision and strategy.

**Together,  
the Steering Group:**

**STEP ONE**

Identified community values and principles that would help define success

**STEP ONE**

Envisioned an optimistic, sustainable, natural resource-based future

**STEP ONE**

Developed and prioritized projects for funding and implementation



# Guiding Principles

The Steering Group identified these important underlying principles to guide the process of Reimagining the Willapa over time toward a chosen, optimistic future.

## Sustainability

We embrace true, triple-bottom-line sustainability as a key to the Willapa's long-term future, which can only be achieved when our region's economy, communities and ecology are each sustainable and resilient.

## Support Tribal Resilience

The Shoalwater Bay Tribe faces monumental challenges dealing with global climate change, a problem not of their own making. They deserve the support and partnership of their neighbors at every level – local, state, and federal.

## Youth Opportunities

We will expand opportunities for the youth of the Willapa to stay and thrive in the region through creating good jobs, quality education and workforce development programs, and growing our stock of quality housing.

## Flourishing Small Businesses

Small businesses drive the local economy, and we will support their ability to thrive, with special attention to supporting women and minority-owned businesses that have traditionally faced added obstacles.

## Thriving Shellfish Industry

The shellfish industry is, and must remain, a primary backbone for the region's economy, quality of life, and ecological health, and we will support them as they adapt to 21st century changes and challenges.

## Diversity

We hold the ethnic diversity of the Willapa as a strength and honor the values of respect and inclusion for all, knowing that we will grow best by growing together.

## Connection

By strengthening regional connections across our towns and ethnic communities, and integrating Willapa's identity, vision, and projects, we will gain the most community value from investments, and succeed in building a future of shared prosperity.

## Housing Affordability

We will take all available steps to protect housing affordability for the Willapa's residents as future development raises the cost of land and building.

## Natural Resource Future

We celebrate the Willapa's cultural heritage of being sustained by the area's rich natural resources. And we embrace a future where innovation, sustainability, high-value products, and a whole-ecosystem perspective will ensure that natural resources can continue to power the region's economy and quality of life far into the future.

# Community Values

The Steering Group identified these values as important to their chosen future. These values serve as both guideposts along the way, and success criteria for projects, by asking how projects can most fully serve these values, needs, and opportunities.

## TRUE TO CHARACTER

- Local Control
- Historical Coastal Designation
- Predictable
- Authentic

## TOURISM

- Cultural Areas
- Lifelong Investment
- Restoration, Expansion, and/or Accommodation of Transportation Options
- Connect Willapa Hills Trail
  - Improved Road Infrastructure
  - ...and more!

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Multi-use Spaces
- Art and Music Venues
- Port Comp Plan: Revitalize Downtown Raymond
- Create Business Opportunities

## THRIVING TOGETHER

- Opportunity for All
- Value and Celebrate Diversity, Equity, & Inclusivity
- Stronger Partnerships
  - Pet Friendly
- Regional Willapa Branding
  - Health and Wellness
  - Quality Health Care

## SUSTAINABILITY & RESILIENCE

- Emergency Preparedness
- Improved Broadband and Micro-Grid Resilience
  - Expanded Utilities
  - Flood Mitigation

## NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED ECONOMY

- Regenerative Agriculture
- Sustainable Shellfish
  - Fresh, Local Food
- New Production and Manufacturing Models
- Value-added Products

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- Work Readiness Training in School
- Good Paying Jobs for Youth
- Housing Affordability
- Labor Force Recruitment

## INFRASTRUCTURE

- EV Charging Stations
- Broadband Expansion
- Green/Solar Energy
- Advancing Wastewater and Solid Waste Systems
  - Clean Water
  - Energy Innovation

## EDUCATION & CHILDCARE

- Affordable, Available Childcare
  - STEM Education
- Local School Synergy
- More Early Learning Options
- Lifelong Learning Options

# Strategy Overview

After grounding discussions in shared values and aspirations, the Steering Group developed an economic and community development strategy designed to serve as many community values as feasible. The strategy has three economic "pillars," each with 2 or 3 prioritized projects. Additional projects were identified and should be revisited as capacity allows.

## PILLAR 1

### Natural Resource Innovation Economy

Using innovation to grow sustainable natural resource jobs for the long haul



#### Sustainable Shellfish Innovation

Apply promising innovations to critical industry challenges and restore essential maintenance infrastructure.



#### Energy Innovation District

Create an "industrial symbiosis" park where collocated businesses share energy, water, and materials to create higher value products and natural resource jobs while cutting waste, costs, and pollution.



### Resilient Infrastructure

Building infrastructure that supports thriving communities for the coming decades

#### Shoalwater Bay & Tokeland Infrastructure Resilience

Bringing innovation and collaboration to build resilience to disaster and climate change impacts.



#### Business-Ready Downtowns

Strategic infrastructure investments that help small businesses thrive in the Willapa's under-realized town centers.



#### Meeting Critical Housing Needs

Fund and build housing projects to close the gap on critical workforce and low-income housing shortfalls.

## PILLAR 3

### Regional Recreation Network

Weaving recreation offerings and infrastructure for economic and community vitality



#### Trail-Ready Willapa

Maximizing positive economic and community impact from additional visitors upon completion of the Willapa Hills Trail in 2024.



#### Willapa Hospitality & Culinary Destination

Create and market a Willapa culinary identity, based on high quality local foods, that supports local restaurants and food producers, and supports the creation of the Kindred Institute in Tokeland to provide career development and education in the hospitality sector.

PILLAR 1

# Natural Resource Innovation Economy

Using innovation to grow sustainable natural resource jobs for the long haul



**PRIORITY ACTION 1**

## Sustainable Shellfish Innovation

The Willapa Bay oyster industry plays an essential role in protecting the economic and ecological health of Willapa Bay, but is facing multiple challenges, each of which poses critical threats to the industry's viability. Put together, these challenges – ghost shrimp proliferation, ocean acidification, and the loss of oyster boat maintenance infrastructure – pose an existential threat to the industry's future.

While ocean acidification has been forcing costly adaptations to industry practices in recent years, growers currently have no viable options for managing ghost shrimp populations or maintaining boats and gear, demanding urgent action and lasting solutions. Bringing global best practices and technologies to Willapa aquaculture, and re-establishing critical maintenance infrastructure, will support the sustainability and viability of this backbone of the regional economy and ecosystem.

**ACTION ITEM**

### Innovative Solutions for Ghost Shrimp Proliferation & Ocean Acidification

Conduct a global scan of promising innovations in aquaculture practices and equipment that offer potential solutions for managing ghost shrimp and ocean acidification and assess their adaptability and applicability for the Willapa. In close coordination with the Washington Sea Grant-led Ecosystem Based Management Collaborative, develop project proposals and funding strategies for installing new equipment or adopting new practices.

**ACTION ITEM**

### Restore Critical Boat Maintenance Infrastructure

Assess shellfish industry boat and gear maintenance needs. Assess and prioritize options for re-establishing regional maintenance infrastructure and service, including but not limited to redevelopment of Bendixsen Landing and re-opening of South Bend Boat. Develop project proposal and funding strategy.

**FUNDING STATUS**

\$240,000 Integrated Planning Grant secured from Ecology for South Bend Boat (site analysis, cleanup costs, business pro forma, cost estimate).

**COMMUNITY IMPACTS**

Reversing recent declines in oyster growing businesses and jobs, building long-term sustainability for the industry, preserving the ecological benefits of a viable shellfish industry, and moving the industry past unproductive "pesticides vs. eco-system" conflict and media attention.





PILLAR 1

# Natural Resource Innovation Economy

Using innovation to grow sustainable natural resource jobs for the long haul



**PRIORITY ACTION 2**

## Energy Innovation District

The once thriving wood products industry in the Willapa Create has suffered since the timber downturn in the early 1990's. The Port of Willapa Harbor is bringing innovation, circular economy principles, and high-value manufacturing to revive wood products manufacturing and create family wage jobs. They are building an "industrial symbiosis" business park around a value-added, wood products manufacturing tenant, where collocated businesses will share energy, water, and materials to create higher value products and natural resource jobs while cutting waste, costs, and pollution.

**ACTION ITEM**

### Energy Innovation District Site Design

Achieve 30% site design to maximize efficiency, adaptability and safety for co-located tenants and the public. The design will include transportation and renewable infrastructure corridors (electricity, hydrogen, thermal loops, water, wastewater, solid waste); feedstock storage; Willapa Hills Trail relocation to maximize views and safety; public interpretation locations; options for future stormwater and nature-based flood facilities; and identification of swing bridge options sufficient for cost construction estimates.

**ACTION ITEM**

### Energy Loop Feasibility

System heating and cooling demand and capture analysis; evaluation of energy source options including renewable hydrogen, solar thermal, or other; phased capacity increments for both energy and water; system and equipment configuration design to 30% sufficient for construction cost estimates and timing.

**ACTION ITEM**

### Modular Industrial Building Design

Achieve 30% design suitable for cost construction estimates and demolition of existing structures, and recycling and reuse of materials and machinery among collocated businesses.

**FUNDING STATUS**

\$3.5 million has been secured to date from CERB, DNR, and CDBG funds.

**COMMUNITY IMPACTS**

Living-wage wood products jobs, recruitment of new tenant businesses at the Port, value generation & cost reductions for tenants, and reduction of waste and pollution.



PILLAR 2

# Resilient Infrastructure

Building infrastructure that supports thriving communities for the coming decades



PRIORITY ACTION 1

## Shoalwater Bay & Tokeland Infrastructure Resilience

The Shoalwater Bay Indian Reservation sits at the mouth of Willapa Bay and is increasingly vulnerable to climate change impacts, forcing the Tribe to expand their reservation uphill. The neighboring town of Tokeland faces current water infrastructure challenges and significant needs to grow their resilience to sea level rise. Both communities need reliable, long-lasting infrastructure to power their economies and communities. These neighbors have chosen to take a collaborative, multi-jurisdictional approach to optimizing system efficiencies, resilience strategies, and economies of scale as they tackle their daunting infrastructure challenges in a groundbreaking, collaborative approach.

**ACTION ITEM**

**Coordinate Among Tribal & non-Tribal Parties**

Facilitate information sharing and collaborative solutions development to maximize economic, community, and environmental value from Tribal and non-Tribal infrastructure investments.

**ACTION ITEM**

**Integrated Assessment of Infrastructure & Resilience Needs and Solutions**

Assess respective and collective regulatory, economic development, and infrastructure goals for Tokeland and Shoalwater Bay Indian Reservation expansion. Explore and recommend alternatives that maximize triple-bottom-line (economic, social, environmental) value from infrastructure investments. Develop project and funding proposals.

**FUNDING STATUS**

The Tribe has been investing funds in Reservation expansion and planning; Tokeland has not yet sought or secured funding for this project.

**COMMUNITY IMPACTS**

Greater infrastructure performance and affordability through economies of scale and avoiding duplication, increased economic and community resiliency to disaster and climate change, job creation, and stronger Tribal and non-Tribal collaboration, a critical factor in building long-term regional resiliency.



PILLAR 2

# Resilient Infrastructure

Building infrastructure that supports thriving communities for the coming decades



**PRIORITY ACTION 2**

## Business-Ready Downtowns

The quality of a community's infrastructure can help or hinder its businesses. Every small town needs its infrastructure to contribute to business success. Strategic investments in smart, priority projects, especially in downtowns – including street upgrades, main street revitalization, streetscape aesthetics, intermodal connections, and restoration or replacement of dilapidated buildings and infrastructure – help fuel a positive economic climate in which independent small businesses can thrive. This project includes trail-to-town connection improvements in Raymond, South Bend, and Tokeland.

**ACTION ITEM**

**Accelerate Street & Sidewalk Grant Strategy**

The Cities should seek preservation funding every year, in addition to other street and sidewalk construction grants for priority projects.

**ACTION ITEM**

**Apply for EV Charging Grants**

Both the US Department of Transportation and the Washington State Department of Transportation offer electric vehicle infrastructure grants to help fund regional planning and installation of electric vehicle charging stations and meet this rising need for residents and visitors. The Cities are on a designated national priority corridor for EV charging.

**ACTION ITEM**

**Angle Parking in Raymond**

Overly wide city streets in downtown Raymond present an opportunity for angle parking, which puts wasted street space to good use. These streets should be considered for conversion to angle parking as activity in the business district warrants. Angle parking is a low-cost response because of the already present underutilized street width.

**ACTION ITEM**

**Pursue Economies of Scale in Paving Projects**

Asphalt often costs less per ton when purchased in large quantities. Willapa communities should collaborate to obtain greater efficiency in street maintenance.

**ACTION ITEM**

**Identify ADA Ramp Needs**

Business districts need barrier-free accessibility, as do walking routes to schools, parks, and other generators of pedestrian trips. WSDOT Pedestrian and Bicycle Program and *TIB Active Transportation Programs* recently received greater funding for local grants.

**ACTION ITEM**

**Improve Downtown Streetscape Aesthetics**

Utilize selected grant projects and low-cost treatments like landscaping, hardscaping, lighting, and banners on light poles.

**ACTION ITEM**

**Targeted Small Business Development**

Strategically target small business development support for improving experiences for Willapa Hills Trail users, such as kayak or bike rentals, lodging and dining.

**FUNDING STATUS**

NA

**COMMUNITY IMPACTS**

More vibrant and prosperous town centers, expanded access to electric vehicle charging for visitors and locals, pedestrian and cyclist safety, small business development, improved visitor experiences, infrastructure affordability, and improved downtown access for people with disabilities.



PILLAR 2

# Resilient Infrastructure

Building infrastructure that supports thriving communities for the coming decades



PRIORITY ACTION 3

## Meeting Critical Housing Needs

Communities around Willapa Bay face urgent housing needs for their current workforce and residents across income levels and are ill-prepared for anticipated growth in housing demand. While long-term planning and capacity-building are needed to map the region's housing future, this project focuses on building near-term housing projects to address critical demand.

ACTION ITEM

American Legion project, Willapa Center?  
TKTK?

ACTION ITEM

Child care elements?  
TKTK?

FUNDING STATUS

TKTK?

COMMUNITY IMPACTS

Housing for current and new workforce, expanded childcare services, increased low-income housing availability.



PILLAR 3

# Regional Recreation Network

Weaving recreation offerings and infrastructure for economic and community vitality



**PRIORITY ACTION 1**

## Trail-Ready Willapa

Build an integrated network of amenities, services and infrastructure around the Willapa Hills Trail that offers positive visitor experiences and facilitates the infusion of money into the regional economy. The area is rich in dispersed active recreation such as fishing, biking, hunting, and birdwatching, and anticipates increased tourism upon the 2024 completion of this bike trail from Chehalis to Raymond. The Trail-Ready Willapa Initiative includes recommendations for seamless integration of the Trail into Raymond and South Bend, and for trail-town connections in Tokeland.

**ACTION ITEM**

### Willapa Wheelstop Project

The city of Raymond should consider repurposing the existing plaza at Raymond Riverfront Park to include a bicycling way-stop and rally point that can provide valuable amenities to bicyclists. The existing plaza needs only modest improvements and grants may be available from the *Washington State Recreation Conservation Office* or the *WSDOT Pedestrian and Bicycle Program*.

**ACTION ITEM**

### Pursue Funding from the TIB Complete Streets Program

The program recently received a substantial increase in funding and stands to emerge as an important funding source for small city projects that integrate infrastructure for all modes - vehicles, walk, bike, access to transit, and streetscape aesthetics. Complete Streets grants can be very useful for connecting street and sidewalks to the Willapa Hills Trail.

**ACTION ITEM**

### Evaluate a Boardwalk Solution to Helen Davis Memorial Park

South Bend has prioritized developing a pedestrian connection from downtown to Helen Davis Memorial Park, but steep slopes limit conventional sidewalks. The city should evaluate the feasibility of a boardwalk along the riverbank similar to the Bellingham Overwater Trail. Additionally, South Bend should consider a downtown riverfront boardwalk project running east from the visitor parking lot similar to the La Conner Boardwalk.

**ACTION ITEM**

### Determine the Future of the Swing Bridge

Action should be taken to determine the feasibility of using the swing bridge for the Willapa Hills Trail. The bridge could be an asset for the Trail, but may be expensive to implement, operate, and maintain. If the bridge is used for the trail, the project may be able to attract grant funding to defray the local cost burden. Repurposing the swing bridge avoids the future cost of addressing its continuing decay.

**ACTION ITEM**

### Improve Walk/Bike and ADA Access on South Bend's Half-Bridge

WSDOT must determine the restoration needs for this 300-foot section of US 101. South Bend should advocate for WSDOT to improve walk/bike and ADA access across Half-Bridge and request *TIB Active Transportation* funding for the sidewalks approaching the bridge, which are in failure and lack ADA access.

**ACTION ITEM**

### Tokeland Walk/Bike Infrastructure

The Tokeland Peninsula has ideal features for walking and bicycling. The top priority is to fund projects needed to connect a continuous nonmotorized path across the entire 3-mile peninsula. A boardwalk treatment on the former golf course site should be evaluated, modeled on portions of Westport Lighthouse Trail. The partial existing trail should be considered for widening and repaving through nonmotorized grants.

**FUNDING STATUS**

NA

**COMMUNITY IMPACTS**

Injection of tourism dollars into the local economy, small business development, connecting visitors to the region's heritage and identity, protecting the social license for sustainable natural resource jobs, increased visitor satisfaction and referrals; electric vehicle infrastructure for visitors and locals, increased visits to local downtowns, pedestrian and cyclist safety, and healthy recreation and commuting for residents.



PILLAR 3

# Regional Recreation Network

Weaving recreation offerings and infrastructure for economic and community vitality



**PRIORITY ACTION 2**

## Willapa Hospitality & Culinary Destination

Willapa Bay is rich in healthy, distinctive, high-quality foods from local aquaculture, agriculture, and foraging. The Tokeland Hotel is the oldest hotel in the state and has an exceptional reputation for culinary and local foods excellence. Goose Point Oysters has purchased property near Bay Center for a new shellfish tourism and education business.

When combined with various food producers that offer high quality fish, crab, beef, cranberries, razor clams and more, and the Willapa’s natural beauty and rich history, the region is well positioned to build a clear, marketable culinary identity that attracts visitors and supports local producers through high-value direct retail and restaurant sales. Through the establishment of a hospitality institute featuring local foods at the site of the Tokeland Hotel, these assets can be further leveraged for workforce development and infusion of outside dollars into the local economy.

**ACTION ITEM**

**Bendiksen Direct Retail Mall**

Refurbish Bendiksen Landing to house direct retail sales for high-quality local artisans and food producers. This 7-acre site on the South Bend waterfront, with 28,000 sq. feet of building space, sits next to the Willapa Hills Trail and a prospective trailhead, making it ideal for visitor traffic.

**ACTION ITEM**

**Kinder Institute**

Establish an institute at the Tokeland Hotel for hospitality education and career development.

**ACTION ITEM**

**Bay Center Shellfish Tourism & Education**

Create an eatery and retail sales outlet for local shellfish, modeled after the successful Hamma Hamma Oyster Saloon and Farm Store on Hood Canal. Include educational opportunities for visitors to learn about the value of sustainable aquaculture.

**ACTION ITEM**

**Culinary Destination Concept & Marketing Development**

Weave the region’s culinary assets into a clear story and brand that supports local food producers and restaurants.

**FUNDING STATUS**

- Bendiksen Landing: \$62,000 planning grant secured from CERB, which establishes eligibility for \$2.5 million loan (at 1% interest) from CERB.
- Bay Center private property has been purchased and is in hand.
- Private property is in hand for Kindred Institute on Tokeland Hotel site.

**COMMUNITY IMPACTS**

Making the Willapa a more attractive destination for culinary-minded travelers, increased tourism, injection of outside dollars into the local economy, quality career development in the hospitality sector for local and visiting students, a supportive eco-system for area restaurants, agriculture, foragers, aquaculture, and other food producers, value-added direct sales for local artisans and producers, and greater public understanding of the benefits of aquaculture.



THANK YOU TO OUR STEERING GROUP REPRESENTATIVES!



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